

The Parable of the Soap Dish



My knuckles turned white, while my fingers cramped.

I hope she didn't notice this grubby soap dish while she was washing her hands, I thought to myself. I continued to scrub at the soap residue embedded on the sides of my plastic soap dish. My soap dish, formerly unnoticeable to me, until a friend stopped by, had needed a good scrubbing for several weeks. After several minutes I stepped back to survey the fruit of my labor.

A sparkling clean dish!

It gave me satisfaction to see that dish every time I washed my hands. I even made special trips into the bathroom to gaze and reflect on how wonderful it looked in comparison to how it used to look. As a matter of fact I enjoyed the transformation so much, I glanced around to see what else I could clean. THE SOCK DRAWER.

I tackled it with gusto!

I emptied the drawer and ruthlessly began to sort socks. Holey socks went to the rag bag, orphan socks shared the same fate. Any socks not worn in the past two years went to Goodwill. I must confess at the bottom of the drawer I found a baby sock from my first born son ... he's now 28.

I was on a roll.

From the SOCK DRAWER (now just a sock drawer) I turned to my closet, then to my dresser and finally to my storage area above my closet. By the time I finished my cleaning my room, a revival was underway. Every room in the house has been affected. I began to notice something changing in my heart. Anxiety and chaos were being replaced by peace, satisfaction, clarity.

My whole life was more under control.

I established new routines. The Ohio Rule (Only Handle It Once) has become my mantra and the 10 Minute Clean-up. My house is now "company ready" even on a Thursday night. I used to think I didn't have time to clean on a daily basis; I'd save everything for a major Saturday overhaul. Now, I actually have more free time. Time to serve others. Time to make meals for those in need. Time to teach a Bible study. Time to sing in a special event.

One small change has led to big changes.

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much..." Luke 16:10. One small thing has led me to improve several bigger things. Doing what is right and good and best for something insignificant has caused me to do what is right and good and best for some things significant.

PS ...

My husband has been affected by the cleaning bug. He recently remarked how messy his side of the kitchen table looked

compared to the rest of the table. He decided to clean it up.

As you go through your day today, look for the little things God has placed within your reach. Who needs a word of encouragement, a helping hand, a home cooked meal. Little things can lead to big things.

Leave me a comment below about your experiences with little things. I'd love to hear from you!

Mary Kane

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Short & Sweet: 2 Ways to Grow Your Gifts



onlybyprayer.com

One of my constant prayer requests is for God to expand my gifts.

I continually ask Him to *gift me greatly* so He can use me deeply. Recently I discovered we have a responsibility in growing our gifts—it's not all up to God. There are two things we can do to help grow our gifts.

1. Use them.
2. Give them.

While both methods closely related, they have subtle differences. Using your gifts requires planning and training, while giving your gifts requires responsiveness and obedience.

Use your gifts.

14 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. 15 And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. 16 Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. 17 And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. 18 But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money."

When the man returned from his travels, he rewarded those who used their gifts, but to the last servant the master said, " 'You wicked and lazy servant ... take the talent from him, and give *it* to him who has ten talents.

29 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.' " Matthew 25

What happened when the two servants

used their gifts?

They were doubled. Wow! Who wouldn't want to double gifts? I know I do. Imagine being twice as good teacher/speaker/writer/principal/secretary/designer/builder than you are now. We can grow our gifts by *using* them. Saving or burying our gifts and talents keeps us small, dark and cold. Only dead things are buried.

Use or lose.

What about the last servant? He lost what he would not give.

As modern Christians we neglect our gifts when we *bury* ourselves in fear, busyness, apathy and laziness. Don't wait until you *feel* ready and don't give up when the going gets tough. God wants us to push through negative emotions. The start of a new project is very exciting! But bumps in the road are bound to come and discouragement can set in. Set backs do not mean God's calling has been revoked—quite the opposite is true. When passion and motivation dwindle, disregard the lassitude and continue working. Take a step of faith and get busy.

People need what you have to give.

Give and gain!

4 Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. 5 Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" Phillip answered, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"

10 Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11 And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the

disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.” John 6

Feast or Famine.

Compared to the size of the need, how big was the boy's lunch? Did the size of his gift stop him from using it? What happened when the little guy gave his lunch? Jesus multiplied it—exponentially. Having raised two hungry sons, the fact the boy gave his lunch is a miracle itself. Giving always requires sacrifice. Like the boy, we have a choice.

1. Keep gift for self. Small. Safe. Unfulfilled. One person benefits.
2. Give gift to others. Big. Scary. Amazing. Everyone is filled. Leftovers!

If we keep our gifts, others will go hungry.

Give your gifts large or small, no matter the size and watch them grow. Your gifts may be small, but your Savior is huge. Give what you have and watch your gifts grow! Use and give.

Action Points:

1. **Risk!** Admit it. There is something you've been waiting to give, but you think it's too small. Walk by faith and give it today.
2. **Look!** See it. Ask God to make you hyper-aware of opportunities to give today. A kind word, \$2.00, a single flower, a short note. They are not too small. Do it.
3. **Unbury!** Face it. You have some buried gifts, dreams, skills that need exhuming. Take a step today to dig them up and use them for God's glory.

Pray

Father, we give You our talents (Matt. 25), our widow's mites (Luke 21), our last drop of oil (1 Kings 17), and our brown-bag lunch (John 6). Please help us to use what You have given us and give what you have entrusted to us so we may greatly impact our world for Christ.

Amen.

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Short & Sweet: Filled



*He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all
the heavens,*

that He might fill all things.

Ephesians 4:10

Empty. I had looked forward to it all day.

My favorite treat—organic dark-chocolate peanut butter cups. Rich and creamy, I love the way they melt on my tongue. Salty and chocolate in one delectable bite (I am sure God made organic dark-chocolate peanut butter cups on the last day of creation because they are VERY GOOD). Peanut butter cups are why I jog. They're why I eat dinner.

All afternoon at school, I had anticipated my after dinner treat with gusto. A few minutes for myself with delicious treat and a good book is like a mini retreat. Bliss. I reached my hand into the bag and ... what? EMPTY. Who did it? Who ate the last treat and left an empty bag? Son #1? Son #2? Husband? I didn't even want to know.

Empty is not good.

Empty is so empty. Empty calories, empty nest, running on empty, empty promises, empty-handed. No one likes empty. Neither does God. God fills things. Look at the following verses:

- "Open wide your mouth and I shall **fill** it." Psalm 81:10
- "Do I not **fill** heaven and earth?" says the LORD."
Jeremiah 23:24
- "Now may the God of hope **fill** you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:13

- “Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD **filled** the tabernacle.” Exodus 40:34
- “Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be **filled**.” Matthew 5:6
- “And they were all **filled** with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Acts 2:4.

My life before Jesus was *#empty*.

I was filled with a consuming emptiness I thought would destroy me. But God used the emptiness to drive me to Him so He could fill my soul with His Spirit and my life with purpose, and meaning. No more emptiness. Only full.



In the original language, *fill* means “to cause to abound, to fill to the full, to make complete, to be liberally supplied, of hollow vessels filled, of the soul thoroughly permeated.” When we are saved, we are filled to the full with the blessings and presence of the Holy Spirit. We are made complete and are liberally supplied with everything we need pertaining to life and godliness. Because we are filled, we have enough to share. Give, and you will receive ... “Your gift will return to you in **full**—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.” NLT Luke 6:38

This brings great comfort to people like me.

Before Jesus, I had nothing to give, nothing to offer; my heart and soul were empty and hollow. How wonderful to know that because of the filling of the Holy Spirit, I now have purpose and resources to bring God glory and help others find, follow and be filled by Jesus.

From empty to filled.

Action Points:

- 1. What's missing from your life?** How is your life incomplete? What do you need God to fill?
- 2. What is taking up too much room in your life?** What do you need to downsize so you can download more Jesus?
- 3. Who can you help fill today?** Whose heart needs to be filled? Whose stomach needs to be filled? Whose mind needs to be filled with the Good News?

Life is sweet. Fill it with Jesus.

Mary Kane

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Short & Sweet: 5 Ways to Fear God, Not Man



Princes also sit and speak against me, but your servant meditates on your statutes.

Psalms 119:23

I have struggled with the **fear** of **man** for a long time. For many years it got the better of me and cost me plenty: lost sleep, decreased fruitfulness, and lack of peace. **Fear** of **man** has caused me to blindly stumble by sight instead of walking by faith with my Savior.

The fear of man.

The **fear** of **man** is a horrible way to live—peace depends on the acceptance and affirmation of others. And those who don't affirm and accept us, own us. Like puppets on a string, we jump and dance, striving to gain approval. Our mind, heart, soul and energy are focused on keeping *them* happy, and *they* will never be happy. The only One who can be trusted to *own us* is Jesus.

When we are in bondage to the fear of man, we are not free to serve God.



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If we follow God, men will not be happy with us, and in some cases, Christians will not approve either. The key to freedom, however, is embedded in the verse above. Instead of meditating on what men say, we purposely and intentionally shift our focus to what **God** says. Focusing on God's Word frees us from the fear of man, and when we **fear God**, He blesses us.

The choice is ours.

From the verse above, we see we have a choice; we can either meditate on the lies and slander of men **OR** the truth and grace of God's Word. Man's word or God's Word? Man's word kills, steals and destroys, but God's Word creates, builds and empowers. Even when He rebukes us, He's busy developing greater character, faith and fruit in our heart.

Meditate=Create



In Hebrew the word *meditate* transliterates as *siyach*, which means “to put forth, mediate, muse, commune, speak, complain, ponder, sing.” It also means, “to talk to oneself.” In addition, *siyach* means “to produce, to bring forth, to germinate, to put forth shoots and buds.” Do you see the progression? Whatever we choose to focus on will produce fruit.

Our Choices:

The Words of Man

1. We hear what others say about us.
2. We think about what they say about us.
3. We tell others what they said about us.
4. We TELL ourselves what others have said about us.
5. We focus and act on lies.

We cooperate with the enemy as he works to destroy us.

The Word of God

1. We read what God says about us.
2. We think about what God says about us.
3. We tell others what God says about us.
4. We tell ourselves what God says about us.
5. We focus on God and act on truth.

We cooperate with God as He works to transform us into the image of Christ, and further His Kingdom on earth.

If you are like me, you sometimes have trouble eliminating the lies echoing through your mind. How do we silence the *broken record* of the lies?

5 Ways to cultivate the fear of

God.

1. **Get a new *broken record*.** Memorize scripture and say it over and over in your mind.
2. **MEDITATE on what God says about you.** Whenever Satan attacks you with a lie (he often does this through other people), speak scripture in your mind and out loud.
3. **Reboot your mind.** When a depressing thought enters your mind or your self-talk turns south, immediately shut it down and go back to step 2. Replace lies with truth.
4. **Hold your ground.** Do step 3 as often as needed.
5. **Praise God.** Turn the temptation to despair into opportunities to praise God. Say something like, "God, thank you that You are using what so-and-so said for my good. I thank you that You are stronger than this situation." Satan will be silenced.

Repeat steps 1-5 as often as needed. There are days when I carry my Bible verse cards with me every where I go. The enemy can be that relentless. But God has given us the victory, if we will only hold our ground and walk by faith.

Life is sweet. **Fear God.**

Mary Kane

Short & Sweet: Feast or Famine?



"1 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters: and you who have no money, "Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

2 "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?"

Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance."

Isaiah 55:1-2

Feast or Famine?

Bread and water are the basic elements of sustaining human life. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that about 805 million people of the 7.3 billion people in the world, or one in nine, suffered from chronic undernourishment in 2012-2014 (worldhunger.org). Less known is the fact that 1.1 billion people lack basic access to safe water (worldthirst.org).

There is another **famine** in our land more critical than the lack of bread and water. The book of Amos calls it a **famine of the Word of God**. Spiritual malnourishment is rampant in our land. God asks everyone who is thirsty or hungry to come and eat and drink – for free. Without money, without price. **Feast or famine.**

Read Isaiah 55:1-2 again.

What food challenge did God's people face? It wasn't lack of money, but poor choice. They were deceived. God's people spent their money on something that was not bread, therefore it did not satisfy. They fed their souls with provisions that left them hungry, undernourished and poor. **Famine.**

God offers an alternative, manna from heaven.

Bread, water, wine and milk to nourish the soul and satisfy the heart. It costs nothing to partake because Jesus paid plenty to provide. What is this manna from heaven God calls us to **feast** upon? Read the second sentence of verse two carefully, "*Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good . . .*"

His Word.

He invites us to **feast** abundantly upon His word—"all you can eat." So many of us settle for tidbits, junk food and meal replacements. Why? Why do so many Christians bypass the **feast** while our emaciated souls cry out for nutrient-dense nourishment of the word? We get by on a verse here, a word there, from a devotional vending machine while God has prepared a banquet for us.

I had a similar experience recently.

A few friends came to spend the weekend. When meal time arrived, we presented the menu and asked our guests to make themselves at home. With a smile I said, "*We have a wide*

variety of organic fruits, vegetables, and salads."

Tension. Fear. Suspicion.

Silence reigned in the kitchen. Faces froze and smiles faded. Everyone quickly begged-off dining with us and said they would eat later. And they did—at a local fast food restaurant. I was baffled. Our guests had a choice:

1. Free nutritious organic food fresh from the garden, or
2. Expensive fake processed food straight from the factory.

And they chose Door Number 2. Quick. Convenient. Familiar. I wonder how often God feels the same way, baffled by our choice to bypass the feast for the snack.

It's time to put an end to drive-thru Christianity. Let's carve some time out of our busy schedules and join God in the feast He has prepared for us. Spending time with God isn't always quick, convenient or familiar, but it will satisfy and nourish your mind body and spirit. Are you hungry? It's time to **feast**.

Action Points:

1. **Identify the junk food in your life:** sketchy TV shows, controversial music, dicey movies, etc. What needs to go to make room for a good helping of God's Word?
2. **Examine your calendar.** What can you cut to make time for God's Word? If nothing can go, you're probably too busy. Or maybe you honestly have your schedule pared down to absolute necessities. Ask God to multiply your time, walk by faith and spend time with God anyway. He will bless you for your sacrifice.
3. **Find ways to put more of God's Word into your day.** Listen to His word on your iPod. Download an audio version of the Bible to your Kindle and listen while you

do chores or fall to sleep at night.

Life is sweet. Come to the **feast**.

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